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ABSTRACT

A review of the history and the literature of second language teaching for business and the professions suggests that the language teaching profession has certain operational premises for developing this curricular area. These assumptions are that: (1) the educational system must be responsive to the needs of society, one of which is for citizens highly trained in foreign languages and business; (2) applied languages are consistent with the humanities and the liberal arts tradition; and (3) the profession's efforts represent a necessary broadening of language training in the United States, which has traditionally been too narrowly focused. Such courses and programs must be considered as legitimate and desirable in academia and as vital to our effectiveness in the world in the future. (Author/MSE)

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UNDERLYING OPERATIONAL PREMISES

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We have just heard two presentations arguing in favor of the study of languages and cultures for business and professional purposes. The perceptions upon which these attitudes are based--this understanding of the appropriate responses of our society to the changing world--these ideas are finding an increasingly large audience in this country. The results of Christine Uber Grosse's timely survey of US colleges and universities, published in last autumn's Modern Language Journal, document the growth of this new kind of language education. Courses and programs in applied languages exist at 62% of the 450 institutions which responded to the questionnaire. In raw numbers, that is almost 300 institutions. In magnitude, this area of curricular innovation qualifies as a major new direction in foreign language education in the United States.

Viewed in historical terms, I think people will see the late 20th century as a watershed in education in this country. Before this time, teaching was the only career normally associated with studying a foreign language at colleges and universities in the USA. Graduates at the B.A. and M.A. levels were trained to teach the language in some high school or perhaps in a community college, while those with a Ph.D. expected to teach language, literature or linguistics at a college or university and to conduct scholarly research. But now, the career options available to language students are multiplying. From this point of

view, applied language studies represent a broadening of foreign language education. The combination of language and cultural studies with all sorts of other disciplines will contribute to the general internationalization of our entire educational system, which in turn is both a part of and a vital force towards the internationalization of our collective consciousness in the United States.

In my opinion, what we are doing here is part a national adjustment to the birth of a new global civilization, the interdependent world community which Alvin Toffler calls "the third wave." Toffler defines history in terms of successive waves of change. The Agricultural Revolution, which dramatically altered the life-style and habits of the early hunter-gatherers, constitutes the First Wave. This initial great advance in our control over our environment evolved slowly, taking thousands of years to spread all over the planet and to become the organizational principle for most of human life. The Second Wave drew masses of people away from the farms and villages and into the cities, where their everyday lives were organized and controlled according to the norms of factory-oriented civilization, which are: centralization, synchronization, standardization, and specialization. This second major historical development, which we call the Industrial Revolution, has taken only about 300 years to dominate the existence of most of the world's human population.

A third great transformation in people's existence on earth, largely unnoticed by the masses, has been underway for over two decades now. Equal in impact to the previous ones but overtaking human lives at a greatly accelerated rate, this Third Wave of changes will take only twenty or thirty more years to gain ascendance over the lives of the vast majority of the world's population. This new civilization will be based on diversified and renewable energy sources, greatly improved and varied methods of production, reliance on computers and world communications systems, ecologically-oriented businesses, conservation, a larger degree of local autonomy, and simpler yet more effective and more democratic governments. No one will be unaffected by this planetary revolution. Whether we realize it or not, we are all witnesses to, and participants in, the birth of a great new global civilization, an historic advance in human development which offers exciting opportunities to improve the quality of all life on earth.

Realizing that the transition from industrial society to the new civilization will not be free of problems, Toffler describes as a super-struggle the clash between the past and the new future in which he believes we are now engaged on a global scale:

> A new civilization is emerging in our lives, and blind men everywhere are trying to supress it. This new civilization brings with it new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new

> political conflicts; and beyond all this an altered consciousness as well. Pieces of this new civilization exist today. Millions are already attuning their lives to the rhythms of tomorrow. Others, terrified of the future, are engaged in a desperate, futile flight into the past and are trying to restore the dying world that gave them birth. (The Third Wave, p. 9)

The increasing celebration of ethnic diversity in our society as a whole, one of John Naisbitt's megatrends, is one element in this wave of changes. The internationalization of our educational system, of which interdisciplinary language programs are a vanguard movement, is another. These two developments are, I believe, important pieces of the Third Wave civilization of which Toffler writes.

Changes of this magnitude, however, threaten the establishment, they represent a menace in the eyes of those with a vested interest in the status quo. The decision to create non-traditional language programs carries with it the potential for dividing foreign language educators into two warring camps: on the one hand are those who accept the legitimacy of this broadening of foreign language education, and on the other are those who fight against it.

I would like to take some time now to present some thoughts on the differences in the premises under which these two groups operate. On the one hand are the attitudes and beliefs taken for granted by traditional foreign language educators, by members of our profession as a whole who for various reasons oppose applied language studies. On

the other hand are the assumptions under which I believe we are operating in creating these new courses and programs.

The language teaching profession in the United States has focused on scholarly research about literature and linguistics. It should come as no surprise, then, that the profession is dominated by people who expect to spend most of their time and energy investigating and writing in areas of linguistic and literary theory. Since any author is the product of a point in time and a specific culture, and since the development of languages evolved over hundreds and even thousands of years, these two pursuits often require a study of history, anthropology and sociology, to say nothing of art, music, dance and other related humanistic activities. The philosophical nature of the insights gained from the study of literature and linguistics lends these disciplines great prestige and makes a natural fit for these areas of specialization within academia.

Language courses and programs with an orientation toward practical training, on the other hand, are often considered to be vocational education. The theoretical aspects of these new areas of specialization are not easily recognized by all people and they have not yet been clearly identified by those of us already involved in the field. Many members of our profession, therefore, look down at language courses and programs which focus on the needs of businesses and other professions. They view applied

language studies as a serious dilution of the traditional curriculum. In their eyes, such programs are devoid of the kind of philosophical orientation and historical perspective required of any serious discipline. These new applied courses and programs, such people conclude, have no legitimate place in academia.

Furthermore, many traditional language teachers are afraid that the new business language courses will draw students away from their classes on literature and grammatical theory. For them, the new offerings present unwanted competition for a shrinking pool of students. The thought of having to teach such courses, for which they have no preparation whatsoever, is distasteful and intimidating to many language teachers. In the worst of cases, such people consider what we are doing as a threat to their own careers and to their professional security.

There are several assumptions here that I would like to call to your attention.

-- The study of languages and cultures in order to specialize in literature and linguistics is a more valuable educational experience to the individual than their study for other purposes such as doing business abroad.

-- The study of languages and cultures applied to business and other professions is really just vocational training and is not therefore basically humanistic in nature.

-- The creation of new business language courses will mean that fewer students will be specializing in literature and linguistics.

Now let's look for a moment at the point of view of the language teachers involved in business language education. Since this has been the direction that my professional career has taken since the fall of 1978, I am speaking for myself and, I believe, for many of my colleagues at EMU.

My first assumption is that language studies, whether for careers in teaching and traditional scholarship or for special purposes such a business, are by definition part of the humanities. Learning something about how foreign people think via the study of their language and examining a foreign culture are uniquely humanizing experiencs, providing direct exposure to other perspectives on life and allowing the individual to gain insights into his or her own language and culture. Applying the study of languages and cultures to the needs of business does not necessarily rob it of its humanistic value. Applied language studies are entirely consistent with the liberal arts tradition. If traditional programs in language and literature are valued for reflecting the philosophical traditions of the humanities, then the newer programs must also be given equal consideration for the same reason.

However, the attack on applied languages as vocational training is not entirely without reason. It is possible to reduce business language studies to the memorization of set questions and answers related to business situations rather than developing in the learner an intellectual understanding

of grammatical structures. It is also possible to present customs related to business practices without expecting learners to view the foreign culture as an interwoven fabric consistent unto itself with its own historical development and traditions.

This kind of "quick and dirty" approach to business languages can give our activities a very bad reputation. In order to have real value in academia, applied language studies must present business practices, vocabulary and concepts within a broader context of culture and language. As business language teachers, we must continually emphasize the humanistic aspects of our specialization. Otherwise, our discipline will be superficial, our graduates will have too shallow an understanding of the world and of themselves to be effective participants in the global community. Otherwise, a specialization in business languages will provide an inferior educational experience for our students.

Finally, a word about competition for students. I do not view applied languages as being in competition for students with the traditional programs in literature and linguistics. The student population that applied language programs draw from is one untapped by language teachers until now; namely, students interested in business who happen also to have an interest in languages. Broadening the foreign langauge curriculum to accommodate the needs of such students attracts a whole new kind of person to our

classes, a kind of student who otherwise would not have continued language studies beyond the minimum required in high school or college. These are not the same students who want to major in literature and linguistics. Reductions in the numbers of such students reflect the regular cycles such studies have experienced in the past, which are in turn a response to the level of need in society for specialists in these areas.

As I see them, our main assumptions are:

-- The educational system must be responsive the the needs of society (one of which is for citizens highly trained in foreign languages and business)

-- Applied languages are consistent with the humanities and the liberal arts tradition.

-- Our efforts represent a necessary broadening of language training in the United States which has traditionally been too narrowly focused.

My main conclusion is that such courses and programs must be considered as legitimate and desirable in academia, and as vital to our effectiveness in the world in the future.

16ACTIVITY: Presentation entitled "Underlying Operational Premises" to be made at the 1986 EMU Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions on April 10, 1986.

SCOPE: National

CRITERION: SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

I have made the commitment to present a 15-minute paper at this conference in order to fill out a session that had a last minute cancellation. The session's title is "The Rationale for Foreign Languages for Business Purposes."

My contribution will attempt to uncover and comment on the unspoken premises of traditional language teachers, of applied language educators, and of traditional American business people. For example, there is a bias in academia in favor of traditional scholarly research and publication in literature and linguistics, and a corresponding generally negative attitude on the part of many language teachers toward research, presentations and publications on business languages. Language courses and programs with an orientation toward practical training are often considered as vocational education, which many professors claim has no legitimate place in academia.

On the other hand, people now involved in applied language instruction operate on the premise that their activities are consistent with the humanities and the liberal arts tradition, that their efforts represent a necessary broadening of language training in the United States (which has traditionally been too narrowly focused and theoretical), that the educational system must be responsive the the needs of society (one of which is for citizens highly trained in foreign languages and business), and that therefore such courses and programs must be considered as legitimate, desirable and vital in academia.

My presentation, which might carry the title "Innovations in the Focus of Foreign Language Education: A Broadening of Humanistic Horizons or an Intrusion of Vocationalism in Academia?," will contain provocative statements such as those listed below, setting up the open discussions.

-- Applied language studies are merely vocational education and therefore have no place in academia.

-- Language and cultural studies for business are consistent with humanistic traditions and must be considered part of the liberal arts.

-- English is the language of international business and Americans need not learn foreign tongues in order to survive and flourish.

-- American business people typically lack an appreciation for the liberal arts; it is the job of humanists to try to humanize the business world.

My presentation will explore briefly these and other related issues, in the hopes of stimulating thought and response from the audience.

An idea of the place this presentation will play in the conference can be perceived from the Tentative Conference Program which accompanies this application (Document #).